

## ***The Fulbright Switch***

A funny thing happened to Senator Fulbright on his way to those open-door hearings on Vietnam policy. He decided to shut the door. And so the public circus promised by the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee has been postponed indefinitely.

The Fulbright switch was sudden, dramatic and commendable. Immediately following the Nixon Vietnam speech, Fulbright appeared in his familiar role as the learned professor lecturing the administration on the error of its ways in clinging to the belief that some point of view, other than the professor's own, might be the correct one.

He ridiculed the President's contention that a majority of the American public backs the administration policy of disengagement with honor. He insisted that there is no shred of difference between the Johnson policy of putting more American soldiers into Vietnam and the Nixon policy of pulling them out. He proclaimed that public hearings were necessary because "Americans will recognize the truth when they are exposed to it" — the unavoidable implication being that what the President was telling the people was something other than the truth.

Then Fulbright met with his commit-

tee for two hours behind closed doors and emerged bathed in the sublime glow of reason and restraint. He and his committee, he announced, would talk things over with the secretaries of Defense and State behind closed doors so as not to "contribute to the inflammation of the public mind." The consensus, he said, was to avoid any action "that might be interpreted as antagonistic. We want to be responsible and careful."

The most logical assumption is that the change of heart, mind and tone came about as the result of some strong persuasion from the chairman's fellow administration-baiters, who felt that this might not be an auspicious time to resume their sport. Perhaps the committee members had taken the time to read the results of Tuesday's election, the latest polls and their mail from home. Perhaps, too, they had stopped to ponder the possible consequences of timing a public grilling of administration officials to coincide with the potentially explosive Mobilization.

Whatever the reason, the decision to move the hearings indoors is the right one, and the new tone of the Fulbright pronouncements is a welcome one. A belated sense of responsibility is infinitely preferable to none at all.